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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, November 3, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "House Mice." Information from the Bureau Biological Survey, Bureau of Chemistry and Bureau of Entomology, U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Rat Control" and mimeographed "Directions for Destroying House Mice."

—ooOoo—

Before Uncle Ebenezer wound the clock last night, he stopped in the hallway and began rummaging around on the high shelf.

"What are you looking for out there, Ebenezer?" inquired Cousin Susan, who was trying to knit one last row on her afgan before the clock struck ten.

"Where did you women put all those new mousetraps I bought last year? I stocked up with a dozen of them and I know I put them right up here on this top shelf. That's the way it goes. A man never knows where anything is if there are womenfolks around the house. When they start tidying up, they move everything from wherever it was to somewhere else."

This was too much for Cousin Susan. She laid down her knitting and with what Uncle Ebenezer calls "her high and mighty manner," she marched out to the hallway and took down a box full of small mousetraps from the very shelf where Uncle Ebenezer had been searching.

"There," she said, displaying the contents of the box before him. "If some men would use their eyes more and their tongues less, they might find their possessions without having to depend on us women for everything. But now that the traps are found, I'd like to know what you want them for. There hasn't been a sign of a mouse around here for months."

"Nothing like being prepared, Cousin Susan. I'm dead sure I heard some ~~scratching~~ and scurrying under the sink last night. Frost in the air, you know, makes most of us think of a cozy warm home for winter. And, the plans of mice and men are much alike as cold weather comes on. The mice that have been summering in the fields and in and out of barns and granaries, begin looking for a warm, indoor shelter with plenty of food at the first cold spell."

Scientists at the Bureau of Biological Survey, who know the ways of rats and mice, say that while poisoning with red squill powder is one of the

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is a general introduction

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best ways of controlling rats, traps are satisfactory for house mice. They suggest using the small, snap-trap with the wooden base and the trigger, since these traps are both reliable and inexpensive. Their low cost allows any household to own a dozen or more--as many as necessary to catch all invaders promptly.

Though mice are not as great enemies to man as rats, a few of them in the house can do a good deal of damage. Much that we said a few weeks ago about rat control, applies also to mice. But there are a few differences, due to the differences in the habits and personalities of these two families of relatives. While the rat is daring, bold and aggressive, the mouse is timid and retiring. Where a rat would attack, a mouse scurries to cover. In fact, the mouse holds its own against rats only because it can retreat into places too small for rats to follow. Rats are keener and more cunning than mice, and therefore harder to catch. A mouse is very likely to step straight into a trap that his larger and more suspicious cousin has been carefully avoiding.

Now as to setting the traps for mice. It isn't necessary to scald the traps each evening, but it is necessary to put in fresh bait and to reset them. Fasten the bait to the trigger. Then place the traps in such a manner that the mice, in following their natural runways along walls, behind objects or wherever there is partial concealment, will pass over the trigger.

Now about the bait. The traditional piece of cheese is not the only bait that attracts mice. In fact, fresh bread and cake are some of the best and most dependable baits. But these may be varied with cheese, bits of fried bacon, sardines, nut meats and even bananas. And for an additional attraction, rolled oats or cereal may be sprinkled lightly over the trap. Mice just like men have better appetites when they are offered a balanced diet containing plenty of variety.

As in the control of rats, the way the house is built and the way food is cared for, will do much in keeping out mice. Rat-proof buildings with concrete cellars make it impossible for mice to come in. And, if all food is carefully kept in tight containers and all garbage and refuse put in a tightly covered, rat-proof cans, mice will be starved out.

One of the places mice are most likely to enter the house is through the drainpipe hole under the kitchen sink. Through this hole they can get in to the kitchen and back to safety and protection in the space between walls. This hole should be stopped up with a little cement. Openings around the bottoms of doors that mice and rats, sometimes gnaw, to give themselves a runway from room to room, may be protected by tin from the ordinary tin can cut straight and nailed on.

Sometimes it is necessary to make war on a large number of mice-- too many for the trapping method. In this case poisoning is sometimes advisable. A simple method is to mix one-eighth ounce of powdered strychnine with an equal quantity of baking soda and stir it thoroughly into 1 quart of rolled oats or oatmeal. This poison may be left in little open boxes or stations in out of the way places where it will provide a permanent poison supply available to the mice at any time they are hungry.





Using this poison, however must, be done with the greatest care since it is dangerous to other animals, like cats and dogs, and is also dangerous to people. Be sure that any such poisoned bait is plainly marked and kept out of the way of both children and pets.

What about using this red squill powder for poisoning mice? Here is one place where mice seem to be keener than rats. The scientists say that they do not take red squill readily as the rats do.

Any more questions about mice or rats? If you think of any, just write me and I'll take them over to these rodent specialists for answers.

Here's an item that will interest everybody, about the care of leather handbags, billfolds, wallets, pocketbooks, and such things. I asked a specialist in the Bureau of Chemistry whether these articles required any particular care.

"Never allow leather articles of this type to get wet," he said. "Carry them where they will not be rubbed, and bent, and exposed to perspiration. Don't keep leather articles in very warm places, because leather that is very dry is harsh, cracky, and easily scuffed. You can lengthen the life of uncoated grain leathers by the use of a leather dressing. Castor oil, or vaseline, may be used for traveling bags, suitcases, and upholstery leather. Russet leather, however, is somewhat darkened by such treatment. Apply a little dressing on a piece of soft cloth, work it in well, with the hands, and then rub the cloth lightly and evenly, over the entire surface of the leather. After a short interval, rub the leather briskly, with a clean, dry cloth, to remove excess grease."

"That's good advice," I told him. "Now perhaps you can tell me how to remove mildew, from leather articles. I had a leather suitcase, once, which was accidentally stored in a damp cellar. The mildew changed the color of the leather. What should I have done with it?"

"Any leather article is almost sure to mildew, if kept in a warm, damp, and dark place, such as a closet, cellar, or stable," said the leather expert. "This mildew probably doesn't make the leather less serviceable, unless it's allowed to remain too long, but it may change the color, and injure the appearance. The simplest way to prevent mildew is to keep the leather in a wellventilated, dry, well-lighted place, preferably one exposed to the sunlight. When mildew develops, it should be washed off with soap and warm water, or simply wiped off with a moist cloth. Dry leather well afterward."

Several people lately have asked about getting rid of fleas on cats and dogs. Derris powder, an insecticide made from the finely ground roots of the tropical plant known as derris, is effective in killing fleas on these domestic pets. Scatter a teaspoonful of powder along the back of the animal and dust it into the fur. Fresh pyrethrum powder may also be used. Neither of these powders is poisonous to humans or animal.

Wednesday: "Questions about Children's Food."

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